

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 22, No. 6

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Whole No. 261

CHARLES ASBURY STEPHENS

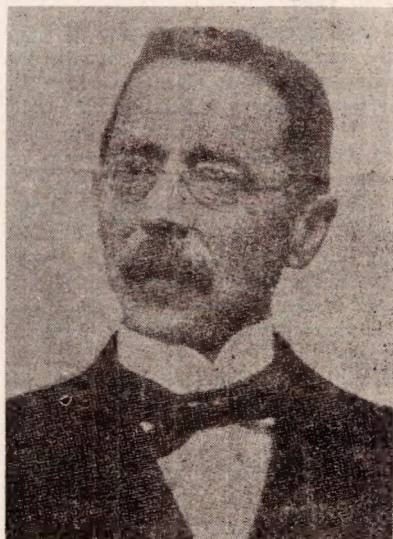
by Esther J. Judkins

(Sent in by Kenneth Daggett)

Charles Asbury Stephens was born in Norway, Maine, October 21, 1844, the only child of Simon and Harriet (Upton) Stephens. His parents on both sides of the family were of English descent. His great-grandfather Joseph Stephens, a veteran of the Revolution, impoverished after the war and seeking to settle permanently, removed from Gray, Maine, to the present site of Norway in 1786 with his three brothers, Joel, Jonas, and Nathaniel Stephens.

The Stephens brothers, Amos and Jeremiah Hobbs, George Lessley of Gray, had already made several trips to this region for hunting and spying out the land for settlement, but in the spring of 1786 they selected their lots, cleared the land, and built a log cabin on the site chosen by Joseph Stephens. In May, Joseph moved his family, consisting of his wife Elizabeth, who was the sister of Amos and Jeremiah Hobbs, and three of their four children, Daniel, Amy and Apphia, from the adjoining town of Paris, where they had been temporarily staying, to their home on the west shores of Lake Pennesseewassee. The other child, Jonas, stayed until the following year with his grandparents in Gray.

Joseph appears to have been the leader of the pioneers and the most progressive of the settlers. Within two years he had paid for his lot and had started to bring to fertility his farm in the wilderness. He ran a public house for about twenty years,



Charles Asbury Stephens
(Courtesy Mrs. Mittie Hazard)

and was one of the selectmen elected at the first town meeting after the town of Norway was incorporated in 1797. The records show that he owned property of enough value to be considered "well-to-do" when he died August 14, 1830. Elizabeth, or "Aunt Betty" as she was called in the community, survived her husband by eleven years, living until April 10, 1841.

In the log cabin which Joseph had built was born May 31, 1788, his son, also named Joseph, who was to be immortalized by his grandson, Charles A. Stephens, as the "Old Squire."

He is said to have been the first male child born in the settlement. Like his father, Joseph Jr. followed the occupation of agriculture. He married Ruth Bradbury, whose ancestors had come from England to Massachusetts about 1634. Her father, Jacob Bradbury, and his wife, Tabitha (Cotton) Bradbury, settled in Norway in 1808. Ruth, born August 29, 1792, appeared in the tales told years later by her grandson as "Grandmother Ruth", although Charles A. Stephens placed the events of the "Old Squire" stories during the ten years after the end of the Civil War. Joseph actually died January 23, 1859, and Ruth, February 8, 1867.

Simon Stephens, the second of their seven children, became a prosperous farmer of Norway. He and his wife, Harriet, whom he married in 1843, were the same age, both having been born August 25, 1819. Harriet was an Upton, whose grandfather, Amos Upton, a veteran of the Battle of Bunker Hill, came to Norway soon after 1790, and whose father, Micah Upton claimed to have one of the finest farms in the vicinity of Upton Ridge, a section in the northern part of Norway.

Their son, Charles, received his first education at the nearby district school, and then attended the local Institute (later Norway High School) for several terms. In 1867 he took the examinations for Bowdoin College and entered that institution as a

sophomore. Although the Norway lad had to earn the money for the greater part of his College expenses, he graduated from Bowdoin in the class of 1869.

It was at Bowdoin that Stephens first became interested in writing. Elijah Kellogg, the Harpswell preacher and writer, was then at the height of his influence. Although he had been graduated from Bowdoin some years before, he often visited the campus, and unruly boys were sent to his home to "rusticate" for a time. Kellogg, who had published some successful books for boys, encouraged Stephens to try writing juvenile stories, and while he was still an undergraduate (1868) he wrote for the *Flag of Our Union*, a weekly magazine, and sold a serial called "Guess" to *Bal-lou's Monthly*.

After his graduation from college, Stephens decided to make a living by writing, and in 1870 he approached the editor of the *Youth's Companion*, Daniel Sharp Ford, to whom he sold two stories for seven dollars each. Encouraged by this success Stephens continued writing at least one story a week for Ford, and also contributed to *Merry's Museum*, a small paper for children, *Our Young Folks*, and *St. Nicholas*. By now his stories appeared under the signature C. A. Stephens. Ford soon put him under contract, however, to write sixty stories or installments of serials a year exclusively for the *Companion*.

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Ads should be submitted by the 15th of the month in order to assure publication in the following month's issue.

"The contract" said Stephens, "was just a few notes made in a memorandum book, unsigned by either one of us, but by it I was to give everything I wrote to the paper."

The *Youth's Companion* had been founded by Nathaniel Willis of Portland, the father of the famous poet and editor.

Nathaniel Parker Willis, and the sentimental "Fanny Fern" Willis, and a partner, Asa Rand, issued a specimen number of the paper April 16, 1827, a four-page quarto which sold for one dollar a year. It had about 5000 subscribers when it was bought in 1857 by Daniel S. Ford and his partner, J. M. Olmstead. The partnership soon dissolved, and Ford became the sole owner and editor of the *Companion*.

He bought more original material with less religious teaching, but with a strong moral tone for the paper, increased the size of the type and the page, and introduced advertising. Well-known writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps began to appear in its pages. The now eight-page quarto, which sold for a dollar and a half a year, increased in circulation to 50,000 subscribers in 1867.

This was an achievement for the Cambridge man, who, reared in near poverty, was able to acquire only a common school education, but who learned the trade of a printer, became the editor of the *Youth's Companion* and earned from its publication millions of dollars which he gave to philanthropy, the best known of his many benefits being the famous Ford Hall in Boston.

From the time he took over the ownership of the *Companion*, all his efforts were devoted to increasing the moral and literary standards of the paper, until it became the most popular and successful family magazine in the country.

For reasons of his own, the man who controlled completely the policies of the *Companion* never allowed his name to appear in the paper, which was published under the guise of "Perry Mason and Company" and

it was not until after his death December 24, 1899 that the true situation was disclosed. (Daniel Sharp Ford.)

The year 1870 marked the beginning of Ford's attempt to build up the editorial staff of the paper. Besides Stephens, Hezekiah Butterworth a sentimental, kindly bachelor, was added in that year. Butterworth wrote many juvenile stories, better for their wholesome moral tone than their literary value. Although he remained with the *Companion* until 1894, his influence was especially strong during the years 1877 to 1887.

In 1881 William Rideing, the "handy man of literature" as he called himself, came to the paper. In contrast to Butterworth, Rideing was a sophisticated, worldly individual, well acquainted with most of the New York Bohemians of the seventies, and proved especially valuable in obtaining contributors from England, his native country.

John H. Woodbury, who, Stephens said, had the most discerning eye for good manuscripts of all the members of the staff, was added to the *Companion* in 1874, and Edward Stanwood, later of the *Boston Advertiser*, came to the paper in 1884. From then on, Ford was constantly adding to the *Companion* staff, but gave his assistants very little to do, for he himself carefully supervised every paragraph that went into the magazine. The three decades from the sixties to the nineties were the most prosperous and influential years for the *Companion*.

During this period many devices were used to increase its circulation. The most successful of these were the numerous premiums offered for the securing of new subscriptions to the magazine. The premium idea served its purpose well, for in 1898 the *Companion* had over a half-million subscribers at a subscription rate of one dollar and seventy-five cents a year.

Ford wanted liveliness, action, humor and convincing youthful characters in his fiction, although he maintained a strict taboo against improper language, romance and crime. Thus

the adventure story of which C. A. Stephens was the undisputed master became one of the outstanding features of the *Companion*.

He was, however, a story-teller rather than a story-writer, and his tales required much revision on the part of the *Companion* staff. For example, a simple sentence in one of Stephen's stories was, "Hiram got a job in a factory," which Mr. Ford, who liked literary embellishments, changed to read "The young man obtained employment in a manufacturing establishment."

Although the earlier stories of Stephens had usually been about Maine and the adventures of boys and girls with such animals as wolves, "lucy-vees" and bears, in 1899 he began a delightful series of stories about life on a farm in Oxford County, Maine, near Lake Pennessewassee, presided over by the "Old Squire" a shrewd, genial Yankee farmer, and his bustling, energetic wife, "Grandmother Ruth". With them lived their six grandchildren, Ellen, Wealthy, Addison, Theodora, Halstead, and the narrator of the tales. As they were written in the first person, many readers assumed that the stories were an exact account of Stephen's boyhood days. The situations in the stories were, in the main, based on actual incidents, but Stephens often changed the order of events, or made a single character out of several persons to make them more interesting. Some of the persons in these tales are easily identifiable. The character of the "Old Squire" was drawn from his grandfather, Joseph Stephens, Jr. and Grandmother Ruth resembled his paternal grandmother. The career of Addison closely followed that of Addison Verrill, a Norway cousin who at an early age exhibited an unusual interest in the study of natural history. When he was nineteen years of age, he wrote to Professor Agassiz of Harvard making arrangements to become his pupil. From 1860 to 1864 young Verrill was Agassiz's assistant in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge. After his graduation from college, he was appointed

professor of zoology at Yale University and taught there until his retirement as professor emeritus in 1907. He also wrote many articles for scientific magazines, principally about marine invertebrates, such as sponges, mollusks, and Crustacea.

(to be continued)

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

Kenneth Daggett says the winter is over, so it's back to work again, as it's tough for a carpenter up in his section, as the winters are really cold. He is after Tip Tops #36, 38, 138, 174 and 175.

Denis R. Rogers of Edmonton, Canada, is taking a trip to California. We all wish him a grand trip and lots of luck in finding and getting the information he is after.

Charles Duprez, of Bellerose, Long Island, made a flying trip up this way, in his auto-buble without wings Sunday May 2nd. Left at 6:30 a.m. got here around 12:30 noon, and the both of us went down to see Eli Messier, and then a homeward he went, and arrived home at 12 to 12 midnight, all in one day, 470 miles. Poor Charlie got all pooped out, but guess he isn't as young as he used to be. He says never again will he try to break a record.

Didja see the big want list of stuff Charlie Bragin wants? Sure lots of novels, etc.

If you are interested in most any old thing, write me for a copy of "Old Timers Mart," you won't be disappointed I'm sure.

I have for sale Pluck and Luck, James Boys Weekly, Wild West Wky, N. Y. Detective Library, Diamond Dick Weekly, Frank Reade Weekly, Log Cabin Library, Secret Service, Young Broadbrim Weekly, Buffalo Bill Stories, Nick Carter, Rough Rider Weekly, Beadles Boys Library, Frank Reade Library, Brave & Bold, Beadles Dime Library, Wide Awake Weekly, Wide Awake Library, etc. Numbers and prices on request. Roy E. Morris, 901 East Michigan Ave., Orlando, Florida.

Early Bicycling Days

By J. H. Ambruster

continued

At one time I met with a terrific sandstorm; it was impossible to see far ahead; nothing to do but sit down and wait; air filled with sand and dust thick as a snowstorm. Covered bike in best possible manner to keep sand from getting into bearings; no life or habitation near, no telling how far to next village or town. When subsided, bike almost buried, myself partly so; ears, eyes, nose, hair well plastered with sand and no bike riding until a stretch of road was reached without a generous coating of sand and grit. Sometimes stopped at R. R. section houses for meals and lodgings; usually well treated, but one night arrived at a Russian camp of this kind. Asked for lodging—nothing doing. Boss said: "We take no strangers; some people no good." Upon insistent pleading, said I could have empty bunk in bunk house. "Empty" meant plain rough board bunk next to open door with cool night air. No bedding of any kind; bunk filled with old shoes, cans and assortment of other knickknacks. My own little blanket did not help much; awake most of night, stiff joints when time to rise. Followed other occupants to mess hall for breakfast. Met Boss at door, who said: "What you want?" Answer, "Like to have breakfast." He said, "No, no tramps allowed here; get a long out here; don't want your money" which was offered him. No breakfast and no other seating place within miles; nothing to do but keep on going. Saw no house until about 3 p.m., about 15 miles, when another section headquarters loomed into sight. Tried there for breakfast, or whatever it should be called. This one managed by two women, husbands members of work gang. They said, "Dinner's over three hours ago; three hours more to supper time; where have you been?" "Well, can't I get something to eat?" was asked. "You can have something of what's left," one said,

"unless you want to stick around til supper time." "What's left" suited better for a hungry man, and I managed to make a fair meal out of everything in sight.

Next important stop was in Colorado where was witnessed the interesting method of conducting a fruit farm aided by irrigation means. Usually irrigating canals are built and operated by large companies, streams being tapped high up in the mountains and water carried to farming sections on lower levels, ditch tenders being on hand along the line to see that users get only their proper share of water for which they have contracted, this being parcelled out by means of lateral canals into the crop-growing areas. At this particular place the method was some what different. Instead of lateral canals, each tree was provided with a length or two of sewer pipe, sunk into the ground close to the tree; then a water or tank cart comes along after having been filled at an irrigating canal, or perhaps at a driven well, and a quantity of water poured into each pipe along side of trees.

Finally reached Denver safe and sound, well tanned about face and neck, and hands well blistered, so much so that after blisters had broken there were patches of dry skin so large that a half dollar coin could be slid underneath. After a few day's rest, I renewed acquaintances, got a job and went to work. The Boss in Denver was known as "Our Easy Boss." I was with him several times; when the wanderlust seized me I would leave for the time being, but could always depend on the "Easy Boss" giving me a job, or if none available by him, finding one elsewhere.

These happenings took place during the time of no automobiles, no cement roads, no eating places along the way, and even in towns hard to find eating places except at hotels,

which caused considerable delays by waiting for meals, and not being able to snatch a bite and hurry on to next stop.

In reminiscing one can only repeat the old saying that: "One-half of the world doesn't know how the other half lives."

The Roundup is indebted to the Denver Public Library and Charlie Duprez for the following newspaper items regarding Mr. Ambruster's bicycle trip.

J. H. Ambruster, a young wheelman of St. Louis, started for Denver on his wheel yesterday. He will go by way of Kansas City and follow the Kansas Pacific Railway.

—"Denver Republican"

May 8, 1889, p. 2, c. 4

A St. Louis Wheelman

Mr. J. H. Ambruster, who left St. Louis on May 7 to make a trip to Denver on his bicycle, arrived in this city on Saturday. He was on the road 26 days. Eleven days of this time it rained. He expressed himself as well pleased with his trip.

—"Denver Republican"

June 3, 1889, p. 2, c. 3.

From St. Louis by Wheel

J. H. Ambruster arrived in Denver yesterday morning with a ruddy complexion that glistened with a healthy glow. He had come from St. Louis having traveled that entire distance on a bicycle. He was exactly twenty-six days and pedaled 982 miles. Rain fell during eleven days when progress became slow. The roads had to be abandoned and the solitary wheelman took to the railroad track, bumping slowly over the ties. The greatest days work was between Wakeenee and Winona, Kan., a distance of seventy-seven miles. Mr. Ambruster was formerly employed in the Colorado Midland office as a stenographer and proposes to remain in Denver.

—"Rocky Mountain News"

June 3, 1889, p. 6 c. 2.

(Advertisements)

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Wanted—Young Klondikes #38 and 39. Will trade or pay \$3 for #38 and \$5 for #39. J. Reischmann, 4824 Flamingo Road, Tampa 9, Fla.

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James E. Knott

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206. J. G. Hunter, 42 Clonavor Rd., West Orange, N. J. (New Member)
207. M. McNeil, 5542 Tilbury Drive, Houston 19, Texas (New Member)
72. L. D. Webster, RFD #1 Box 36, Lake Worth, Fla. (Change in add.)
-

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